

TO: The Connecticut General Assembly

FROM: Dr. Elizabeth Howard

RE: H.B. 5280 (Raised): An Act Concerning the Provision of Bilingual Education in Connecticut

DATE: March 4, 2022

As someone who has worked in the field of bilingual education for over thirty years as a teacher, teacher trainer, and scholar, I am very pleased to learn about H.B. 5280 (Raised): An Act Concerning the Provision of Bilingual Education in Connecticut. I have worked in Connecticut since 2006, when I joined the faculty of the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut, and I have always appreciated working in a state with a firm commitment to bilingual education as indicated by the existing Bilingual Education Statute, but I have also been concerned about certain limitations with that statute, such as the lack of funding and centralized support for the ongoing growth and success of bilingual programs, primarily those that follow a dual language model. Therefore, I am very pleased to see that this proposed bill would address that limitation by providing financial support for bilingual programs, particularly seed grants to dual language programs. There are a number of other beneficial provisions in this proposed bill as well, including the need for districts to submit a plan for program implementation; required collaboration with institutions of higher education, community agencies, and families; ongoing teacher recruitment and teacher training; continuous monitoring of student performance; and recommendations to incorporate culturally sustaining pedagogical practices. These key ideas of planning, collaboration, staff quality, progress monitoring, and the use of appropriate instructional strategies are all aligned with recommendations that my colleagues and I have made in the [Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education](#) (Howard, et al., 2018), a dual language implementation guidance document that is used widely across the United States. However, there are other factors that are not addressed in the bill that are also important to keep in mind for the successful implementation of dual language programs, such as the need for schools and teachers to have autonomy to select appropriate curricular materials that support dual language instruction and to determine appropriate pacing for the use of those materials; the need for assessments in the partner language as well as in English and for the progress monitoring to take into consideration performance in both languages and the different performance trajectories of bilingual learners vs. monolingual learners; and the need for ongoing professional development for teachers, administrators, and staff that is specifically targeted to dual language instruction. I hope that these considerations will be factored into the resulting guidance and implementation if this bill is passed, and I would be happy to contribute my expertise developed through my work as a UConn professor and a business owner of a Connecticut-based dual language education consulting firm (Dual Language Connections, LLC) to support its implementation. Additionally, I chair Higher Education Advocates for Language Learners (HEALL), a group of higher educators and others in the state with a commitment to strengthening educational opportunities for multilingual learners, and this group likewise supports the passage of this bill and would be happy to leverage its collective expertise to ensure strong implementation of the proposed bill's provisions. For example, representatives from the Multistate Association for Bilingual Education, Northeast (MABE-NE) participate in HEALL, and MABE-NE has created a guidance document for bilingual and dual language implementation in Massachusetts that could be used as a point of departure for a Connecticut guidance document. In summary, given the consistent research on robust academic outcomes for students in dual language programs, I strongly support the passage of this proposed bill.